

AN
INQUIRY
INTO THE
NATURE AND EXTENT
OF THE
INSPIRATION OF THE APOSTLES,
AND OTHER
WRITERS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT:
CONDUCTED WITH A VIEW TO SOME LATE OPINIONS
ON THE SUBJECT.

BY WILLIAM PARRY. *K*

"That ye may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the
"Holy Prophets, and of the Commandment of us the Apostles of the
"Lord and Saviour." 2 Peter iii. 2.

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1797.

THE HISTORY OF THE

WARRIORS AND KNIGHTS

INSPIRATION OF THE APOSTLES

WRITERS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT



BY WILLIAM PATER

IN TWO VOLUMES

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P R E F A C E.

DIFFERENCES of religious sentiment have long existed in the Christian world, and it is much to be wished, that they were fully discussed, in the Spirit of love and meekness. Gentleness of manner is not inconsistent with zeal for truth, and it is undoubtedly possible, to contend for the *principles*, without renouncing the *Spirit* of Christianity.

Free discussion, conducted by this amiable disposition, if it could not determine some points that have been long in dispute, would shew to impartial minds on which side the force of evidence lies; and would promote that genuine Candour, which results, *not from an indifference to truth*, but from a liberal and enlarged acquaintance with it.

In order that discussion might be brought to this desirable issue, it is requisite that those who *differ*, should be agreed on some *common medium*

of proof, or some common *standard of truth*, to which their differences may be referred; for, until this be done, discussion will be but *endless*, and in some views, *fruitless* debate.

If Christianity be a *Divine Religion*, it must have a *Divine Rule*, by which every thing respecting it is to be ascertained. The first thing therefore necessary, in the present state of religious controversy, is to determine what degree of Credit is due to the Scriptures, as the rule of *religious sentiment*; or *how far* the Apostles, and other writers of the New Testament were *inspired*, and *their opinions* are to be the guide of *ours*.

It is evident, that some entertain very low ideas of their inspiration, and speak of them as *fallible* in their religious sentiments, but it does not appear, that any writer, who embraces this view of the Apostles as Christian teachers, has given a *clear*, and *full* statement of his ideas on *this* subject. The short controversy which took place respecting it, between Mr. Burn and Dr. Priestley, terminated, on the part of the latter, without a full elucidation of his sentiments concerning it. It is, however, very desirable, that the Doctor, or some who think with him, would come forward, and *explicitly state their ideas* of the *inspiration* of the Apostles, because

it is the *turning point*, on which the Socinian Controversy in general depends.

The following pages were written with a view to subserve the cause of Truth, by an examination of the Scriptural evidence on this subject, and are therefore submitted to the Candour of the Public.

Little Baddow, Essex,
February 6, 1797.

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it is the same way as which the following
Copies of the original documents
The following pages were written with a
view to illustrate the case of T. H. by an ex-
amination of the original evidence on this
subject and a reference to the Can-
ton of the same.

These are the
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INTRODUCTION.

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INSPIRATION is a term which, in its strict and primary sense, as used by theological writers, means the immediate communication of knowledge from God; and in this sense, it is synonymous with the word Revelation. But it has been common with divines, to use the term in a less strict and proper sense, for such a degree of divine influence, assistance, or guidance, as enabled men to communicate religious knowledge to others, without error or mistake, whether the subject of such communications were things which were then immediately revealed to those who declared them, or things with which they were before acquainted. In both views, the term implies a previous idea, the *possibility* of an *immediate* communication from God to the human mind, or the doctrine of *divine influence*.

That the author of the human mind *can* have access to it, and can influence that mind, either to

reveal things to it, or to direct its attention to things revealed long before, and dispose it to receive them, is a position which is so far from being false, that the denial of it would involve an absurdity. It would be absurd to suppose, that it is impossible for God to do any thing which is not inconsistent with the goodness and perfection of his nature: but it never can be made to appear, that it would be incompatible with his perfections, or unworthy of his goodness, to influence the minds of his rational creatures; to communicate religious knowledge from heaven to some men, for the purpose of instructing others; or to lead men by a secret agency to regard and obey that instruction which is contained in his word. On the contrary, to exclude "the God of the spirits of all flesh," from having access to the spirits he has formed, would imply a restraint upon his power not consistent with Omnipotence, and would prescribe limits to that divine benevolence, which, according to our conceptions, cannot be more worthily employed, than in promoting the *moral good* of his erring and fallible creatures. It is therefore neither irrational, nor unphilosophical, to suppose, that God can, by his immediate agency, influence the minds of men.

The difficulty of conceiving of the *mode*, in which such divine influence takes place, is not a solid objection against the *possibility* and *reality* of it in certain cases. We know not the mode of the divine operation in other instances, where, nevertheless,

theless, we are certain it does exist. We see evident expressions of skill and contrivance, of admirable wisdom, infinite power, and abundant goodness, in the formation and arrangement of the universe. We have not more reason to suppose, that the world could preserve itself in being, independent of the all-wise and powerful first cause, than that it could give itself existence. We must therefore admit, that he who created, does also uphold all things by the word of his power; and that what are called the laws of nature, are nothing else than the different parts of the material system continuing to act, in that direction which the will of the Creator at first gave them, and in which it constantly preserves them. Yet we do *not know the mode* whereby divine power and wisdom first operated in the production of the universe, nor *that* in which they continue to operate for its preservation; so that if we will not admit of a divine influence in any cases but where we understand the *mode* of its operation, we must exclude the agency of God from the *natural*, as well as from the *moral* world. If, therefore, we believe that there is an infinitely wise, intelligent, and good Being, the Creator and Preserver of all things, we must, on the same ground admit, that it is strictly philosophical to suppose he can, if he thinks proper, influence the minds of his reasonable creatures, and give to men a revelation of his will.

That he *has* done this, and that the Holy Scriptures are the word of God, is a fact generally ad-

mitted by professing Christians, and may be proved by a great variety of arguments. It is not the design of this essay, to enter into the *general evidences* of Revelation, which have been so clearly and fully stated by many writers of the present century, both in our own and foreign countries; but rather to consider the subject in a different point of view, which is more peculiarly interesting to Christians themselves, with relation to the religious controversies that exist among them, and the degree of deference that is to be paid to the sacred writings, and especially to the New Testament, as the guide of religious opinions.

Amongst those who admit, in general, that the writers of the New Testament were inspired men, or receive it as a revelation from God, it has been questioned by some, how far their inspiration extended? Whether to every thing which they taught, or only to the great and leading facts and doctrines of Christianity? Whether, as to some things in religion, they were not left merely to the exercise of their own minds; and consequently, Whether in some cases they might not be mistaken in their religious sentiments, as well as other men?

It will readily be perceived, that it is of no small importance to the faith and consolation of Christians, that they should have clear and consistent ideas of the inspiration of the Apostles of Christ, who first propagated Christianity in the world, and were the principal instruments of recording

ording it for the perpetual instruction of the Church. The greater part of the New Testament was written by some of them; and if there be reason to conclude, that they were under the infallible guidance of the Spirit of Truth in what they have taught and written for the instruction of mankind, it will follow, that their testimony and declarations are *authoritative* and *decisive* in all matters of religious faith and practice. But if there be not reason to believe that they were under such infallible divine direction, we must then seek for the proper standard and criteria of what is true or false in Christianity, from some other sources than the Apostolic writings.

The design of the following Essay therefore is, to inquire into the *nature* and *extent* of that inspiration, or divine influence and guidance, which the Apostles and other writers of the New Testament were under. It must be acknowledged, that this is a subject which is not without its difficulties. Yet admitting the Scriptures to be the word of God in general, there is reason to apprehend, that sufficient information may be found therein, to direct our opinions as to the *degree* of divine influence, with which the Apostles were favoured. On this subject, all just and accurate ideas must be derived from the New Testament itself. The proper mode of investigating it, is not by forming an hypothesis, and endeavouring to support it, but by an impartial and diligent appeal to the Scriptures themselves, to collect from thence what the

sacred writers have taught concerning their own inspiration:

The first object of inquiry, therefore, shall be, what account the writers of the New Testament give, concerning the mode in which they acquired the knowledge of Christianity.

It will then, be natural to consider, what *just* deductions and conclusions may be drawn from the account they give of the nature and extent of that divine influence, which they were under.

This may lead us to survey such arguments, as the Scriptures, and the nature of the subject suggest, in support of that view of the apostolic inspiration, which is furnished by their own account.

SECTION I.

Of the Manner in which the Apostles received their Knowledge of Christianity.

IN considering this branch of the subject, it will be necessary to distinguish the case of the Apostle Paul, from that of the other Apostles; for as he had not been with our Lord during his ministry upon earth, he had not possessed those opportunities of receiving instruction from him, which they had enjoyed. Accordingly, we find, that the way in which he received the knowledge of the Gospel was,

was, in some respects, different from that in which it was communicated to them. As his conversion was extraordinary and miraculous, so it appears, from his own account, that he received the whole of his knowledge of Christianity by *immediate Revelation*. When writing to the churches of Galatia, in order to vindicate his apostolic character and mission against the insinuations of Judaizing teachers, he asserts, in the most *positive* and *unequivocal* terms, his own inspiration. His words are these: "But I certify you, brethren, that the Gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ*." Thus he bears testimony, that the Gospel which he preached, was not after the invention, contrivance, or instructions of men; that he did not receive it from the declarations of other men, neither was he taught it by any of the ordinary methods of instruction; but that the knowledge which he had of the Gospel, had been given him by revelation of Jesus Christ. It had been immediately communicated to him from heaven, which is inspiration in the first and highest sense of the word. This did not give Paul any pre-eminence above the other Apostles, but placed him upon an equality with them, or constituted him *an Apostle*, that is, one who had received his doctrine and commission from Christ himself.

* Gal. i. 11, 12.

The other Apostles had all been the disciples of Christ, and had constantly attended him through his ministry. If we advert to what is said concerning them in the New Testament, we shall find, that there were three sources of information, from whence they received their knowledge of Christianity; and which, taken together, were sufficient to render their knowledge of it perfect, and their testimony infallible. These, were the personal instructions of Christ, their being eye-witnesses of his miracles and many other facts concerning him, and the teachings of his Spirit.

I. The Apostles were taught many things by our Lord's personal instructions. He was the first and chief messenger of his Father's will and grace, and "taught the way of God perfectly." The Apostles, being his constant attendants, both in public and private, heard his heavenly doctrine. They were present when he taught from a mountain, from a ship by the side of the sea, in the desert, in the city, in the temple. When he testified against the vices and corruptions of the Scribes and Pharisees; when he pointed out the errors of Jewish teachers in doctrine and morality; when he taught the pure principles of love to God, of righteousness, justice, and benevolence to man; when he represented the nature of his own character and work, that he came "to seek and to save that which was lost, and to give his life a ransom for many," the Apostles were his constant hearers. Many parts of his discourses in public were addressed

dressed to them, and after he had spoken to the
 multitudes which followed him, by parables and
 similitudes, it is said, that "when they were alone,
 "he expounded all things to his disciples*." By
 his private conversation with them, he instructed
 them in his doctrine, and communicated much
 useful religious knowledge to their minds. In
 several chapters of the Gospel according to
 John†, we have an account of the edifying dis-
 course which Christ held with them a little before
 his sufferings. For their encouragement, he then
 set before them, the peculiar and glorious hopes
 of the Christian system; announced to them the
 opposition they must expect from the world; com-
 forted their hearts in the view of it, and gave them
 the promise of the Spirit, to furnish them for the
 proper discharge of the work to which he called
 them. After our Lord's resurrection from the
 dead, he was frequently seen by the Apostles, and
 discoursed with them of the things relating to the
 nature, order, design, and blessings of his spiritual
 kingdom: "Being seen of them," saith the sacred
 historian, "forty days, and speaking of the things
 "pertaining to the kingdom of God‡."

In this familiar intercourse with Christ, from
 the commencement of his ministry to the time of
 his ascension, it must necessarily be admitted, that
 the Apostles received much religious knowledge
 from him who dwelt in the bosom of the Father,

* Mark iv. 34.

† From the 13th to the 16th inclusive.

‡ Acts i. 3.

and

and came to reveal him unto men; and that they must have imbibed much of the spirit of that holy and benevolent religion which he taught. Nevertheless, it is evident, that during this period, they often did not fully understand the meaning of our Lord's instructions. Until after his resurrection, clouds of ignorance, and mists of Jewish prejudices enveloped their minds, so that they were in a considerable degree mistaken, in the apprehensions which they *then* entertained, of the nature and design of his character and kingdom. We cannot, indeed, ascertain the precise degree to which their knowledge of Christianity extended, at the time when our Lord left them. Nor is it all necessary that we should, because they were to have the gift of the Spirit to clear what was obscure, to correct what was mistaken, and to supply what was defective in their ideas of Christianity. But it may be here remarked, that whatever religious knowledge they received from Christ, was of the same kind, and of the same divine truth and certainty, as that which they afterwards received from the Spirit. For he was "the faithful and true witness," who had the mind and will of God, and in whom was the "Spirit of wisdom and knowledge." The gift of the Spirit, which they afterwards received, was "the Spirit of Christ," which was given to supply the place of his personal instructions to them. Those parts of their religious knowledge, therefore, which they received from Christ himself, must be considered as of equal authenticity and import-

importance with those which they might afterwards receive, by immediate revelation from Heaven.

II. In addition to what they heard from Christ while he was with them, their knowledge was enlarged, by their being eye-witnesses of the miracles which he wrought, and of many other facts which respected him. They saw his works. Our Lord himself appealed to these, as the evidences of his divine character and commission. When John the Baptist sent messengers to ask him, "Art thou he that should come, or look we for another?" Jesus answering, said unto them, Go your way, and tell John what things ye have seen and heard; how that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the Gospel preached unto them*." Of these divine works the Apostles were constant spectators. When the Son of God gave eyes to the blind, and feet to the lame; when he rebuked the boisterous sea, and it was calm; when he fed several thousands with a few loaves and fishes; when he restored a withered arm in the synagogue, and called the dead Lazarus from the tomb; they beheld these wonderful miracles, and saw in them the divine attestation to the character and mission of Jesus of Nazareth.

The Apostles were eye-witnesses also of our Lord's transfiguration, sufferings, death, and resurrection, which were some of the most important

* Luke vii. 20, 22.

facts relative to Christianity. Three of their number were with him on "the Holy Mount." Some of them saw him expiring on the Cross; and though they did not see him coming out of the grave, yet "He shewed himself alive after his Passion by many " infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days " after his resurrection. They could not be mistaken as to those facts of which they were eye-witnesses, or those miracles which were wrought in their presence. From the evidence of their senses, they knew that Jesus died and rose again; they knew that he " had done among them the works which " none other man did†;" and they might very naturally infer from them, that " he came forth " from God," and that " God was with him."

From these things it follows, that there was no necessity for inspiration, or immediate suggestion from the Spirit of God, to inform the Apostles of many things in Christianity, for they knew them already from the discourses of Christ, and their own observation. The fullest credit is accordingly due to their testimony respecting these things, if we were to consider them only as honest men who were not inspired. As men of integrity they were able to give an *honest* account of what they saw and heard, without any supernatural or divine assistance; and if they had only given such an account it ought to be credited. But it does *not* follow, that merely as honest and *uninspired* men,

* Acts i. 3.

† John xv. 24.

they

they could have given such a full, just, and consistent account of these things, as is contained in their writings. On the contrary, it is not supposable, without an extraordinary stretch of credulity, that, at the distance of time in which the Gospels were written, they should be able, without special assistance from Heaven, to give such a particular account of the works, and of many of the discourses of our Lord, as are recorded in them. Let any man attempt, at the distance of but a few weeks, to give a narration of a number of transactions which he has seen, or of discourses which he has heard, and how lame and defective will his account be, in comparison with that, which the sacred writers have given us of the words and actions of Christ. This, however, is only remarked occasionally. Much they knew undoubtedly without inspiration, and therefore they themselves appeal to their personal knowledge of the things which they testified, as a circumstance which strongly corroborated the credibility of their testimony. "For we have not followed," saith the Apostle Peter, "cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were *eyewitnesses* of his majesty. For he received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. And this voice, which came down from Heaven, *we heard* when we were with him

" in

"in the holy mount *." The Apostle John, in like manner, appeals to the personal knowledge which he and his brethren had of Christ, for the truth of what they declared concerning him. "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled of the word of life, declare we unto you †." The evangelist Luke also mentions the personal knowledge of the Apostles, as an evidence of the validity of their testimony. The things of the Gospel he calls, "Those things which are most surely believed among us, even as they delivered them unto us, which from the beginning were eye-witnesses and ministers of the word ‡." But whatever the Apostles might know, from beholding many facts respecting our Lord, or hearing his doctrine, it was not a *complete* knowledge of Christianity which they acquired, from these sources of instruction. We are informed therefore by the New Testament,

III. That they received much of their religious knowledge from the *teachings of the Holy Spirit*. The descent of the Spirit upon the Apostles, on the day of Pentecost, is a well known fact, and from that day, they appear to have been fully qualified for the discharge of their office. This effusion of the Spirit had been promised to them, by our Lord,

* 2 Pet. i. 16—18.

† 1 John i. 1 and 3.

‡ Luke i. 1 and 2.

in his conversation with them, the night before he suffered. "I will pray the Father," said he, "and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever. Even the spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive *." He afterwards said to them, "But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you †." In a subsequent part of his discourse our Lord added, "Howbeit, when he, the Spirit of truth is come, he will guide you into all truth; for he shall not speak of himself, but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come. He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you ‡."

Several particulars in these verses, are worthy of our most careful and minute observation, and will greatly assist us in judging of that supernatural instruction and guidance, which were afforded to the Apostles. The Comforter that should come to them, was to be the Spirit of TRUTH, not of ERROR. He was to *abide* in them *for ever*. He was to teach them *all* things; to bring *all things to their remembrance* that Christ had said to them; and was to guide them into ALL TRUTH. Let us reason upon these ideas.

* John xiv. 16 and 17. † Ver. 26. ‡ Chap. xvi. 13 and 14.

The Truth, all Truth into which the Spirit was to lead them, means undoubtedly, *all that Truth* which, as the Apostles of Jesus Christ, they were to declare unto the world. It does not mean natural, mathematical, or philosophical truth, and it would be absurd to refer the language of our Lord to either of these. But it means *Christian truth*. The truth which they were to teach mankind, to make them wise and holy, and direct them in the way to heaven through our Lord Jesus Christ. The Apostles knew something of this Truth already, but they did not know it *perfectly*. They were ignorant of some things, and mistaken as to others. But the Spirit was to guide them into *all* truth. No branch of it was to be kept from them. They were to be led into an acquaintance with religious truth in general; with the *whole* of that *religious truth* which it was necessary for them to teach, or for men to know. Must they not then have been preserved from error in what they taught and declared? The Spirit was to teach them *all things*. Not the things of the natural or civil world, but *those* things of the Gospel which they were *as yet* unacquainted with. And if the Holy Spirit taught them all things respecting Christianity, which they did not already know, then there was nothing in what they declared of the christian system, but what they had received, either from his teachings, or from the instructions of Christ which were of equal validity, or from the evidence of their senses which could

could not deceive them: so that they must be preserved from error or mistake concerning it.

The Spirit was also to bring all things to their remembrance, that Christ had said unto them. Their memories were naturally like those of other men, imperfect and fallible; and amidst the numerous things, which their Lord had said and done amongst them, some would be forgotten. But the Spirit was to assist their memories, in such a manner, that they should have a perfect recollection of whatsoever Christ had said to them. This assistance of the Spirit implied, not merely recalling to the view of their minds the things which Christ had spoken, but also the enabling them to understand those things *rightly*, without that confusion and misapprehension, which jewish prejudices had occasioned in their ideas, when they first heard them. Unless they were led into such a perfect understanding of the things they were enabled to remember, the bare recollection of them would be of little use, nor would the Spirit act according to his office of leading them into *all* Truth, unless they were enabled by his influences, properly to understand the truths which Christ himself had taught them.

The Holy Spirit, under whose teaching they were to be thus instructed, was to *abide with them for ever*, as the Spirit of Truth, guiding them into all truth, teaching them all things respecting the doctrine of Christ which they were to communicate to the world. These important promises of the effusion, assistance, direction, and perpetual guidance

of the Spirit with the Apostles, were most certainly *fulfilled*, in all their extent and meaning. They were promises given by Christ himself, the great and chief prophet of the church; and to entertain a doubt of their *most complete* accomplishment, would be to impeach the veracity and mission of the Son of God, and to admit a supposition, that would strike at the truth of Christianity in general. From this examination therefore, of the nature, extent, and fulfilment of our Lord's promises, concerning the gift of the Spirit to the Apostles, does it not necessarily follow, that, in addition to what they previously knew of Christianity, they were led, under the teachings of the Spirit, into a *perfect* acquaintance with it; and that through his constant inhabitation and guidance, they were infallibly preserved in the truth, and kept from error in declaring it to mankind? The Spirit of Truth guided them into *all* truth, and abode with them *for ever*.

If we compare this view of the special divine assistance which they enjoyed, with what the Apostles say of themselves, we shall see it confirmed. After the descent of the Spirit, we never find them under the influence of mistaken ideas. From *that period*, they appear to have had a just and consistent view of Christianity, though it was not until some time after, that they were led to see the extent of their commission to declare it to the Gentiles. In the book of the Acts of the Apostles, they are represented as "full of the Holy Ghost," speaking "as the Spirit gave them utterance," and acting accord-

according to his direction. The language of the Apostle Paul to the Corinthians, when speaking of the other Apostles as well as of himself, shews that their knowledge of Christianity was made perfect through the inspiration of the Spirit, and that they taught and declared it under his influence and guidance. Concerning the things of the Gospel he saith, "God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth, comparing spiritual things with spiritual *." In these and other passages of scripture, which will be brought into view under a subsequent branch of the subject, the Apostles claim to themselves to be under the guidance of the Spirit of Truth, in *teaching* Christianity to the world. The validity of this claim, we shall further see, in the prosecution of our inquiry.

* 1 Cor. ii. 10 and 13.

SECTION II.

Deductions and Conclusions from the preceding Account.

THE Apostles of Jesus Christ possessed, as we have seen, the fullest sources of information concerning his religion. Having been his disciples and constant followers, they learned many things relative to Christianity, from his discourses and instructions. Their knowledge was enlarged by being eye-witnesses of his miracles, and of some of the most important facts respecting him. And what they did not know by these means, or did not fully understand, was afterwards *revealed* to them by the Holy Spirit, which our Lord had promised. From this account, contained in their writings, of the way in which they received their religious knowledge, the two following deductions or conclusions may be justly drawn.

Have I. First, that the Apostles had a *complete* knowledge of Christianity, or of the Gospel which they published to mankind. When it is said, that they had a complete knowledge of the Gospel, we mean, that they knew, and well understood, the truths which they were commissioned to preach, and the duties they were to inculcate. Having been instructed by Christ himself, having been witnesses of his works, and of his death and resurrection, and having received the Spirit to "guide them into all truth," they had a competent knowledge of the various

various subjects, which they were to preach and publish to the world, to instruct men in the knowledge of God, the way of salvation, and the duties of holiness. They were neither *insufficient* nor *defective* preachers of the word of Truth. They were at no loss to know what was true or what was false, what was agreeable to the will of God or what was not. They had a complete and consistent view of the whole system of Christian truth and duty; and there was no *diversity* of religious opinions amongst them. Their knowledge of Christianity was perfect, for they were acquainted with "all things," which it was the will of God should be revealed unto men, to teach them the way of salvation.

Whether, as is most probable, the Apostles had this complete knowledge of the Gospel at once, on the day of Pentecost; or whether, there might be some truths and duties of religion, which were not revealed to them until after that time, is of no importance for us to determine. For it is certain, that their knowledge of Christianity was complete, long before the records of it in the New Testament were written for our instruction. It is evident also, that the Apostles, in the course of their ministry, were never at a loss what doctrines they were to preach, but had at all times, a perfect knowledge of the things which it was the will of God they should, at those respective times, declare. Less than this cannot be inferred from their own declaration, that they spake the things of the Gospel, "not in

"the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but
 "which the Holy Ghost teacheth."

As the Apostles, by means of our Lord's instructions and the teaching of his Spirit, had this complete knowledge of Christianity, it follows that the most entire credit is to be given to their writings; and that they were not mistaken in what they have written concerning it, whether we suppose them to be immediately guided by the Spirit at the time they were writing or not. For allowing only, that they were honest men who completely understood Christianity, it is evident that they must give a *true* and *faithful* account of it. Honest men would not deceive, and men who had a *complete* knowledge of the subjects they were treating of could not be mistaken. If any errors in doctrine or sentiment were admitted into their writings, it must be either by design, or through accident. To imagine that they could be inserted designedly, would impeach the *integrity* of the Apostles, and consequently their credibility in general. And to imagine that they crept in *accidentally*, would impeach the competency of their knowledge, and supposes that the Apostles of Jesus Christ did not understand Christianity: a supposition that can never be reconciled, with the very lowest construction which can be fairly put upon our Lord's promise, that the spirit should guide them into *all truth*. Allowing them therefore to be but *honest men*, it follows, considering the sources of information they enjoyed, that all they have recorded concerning Christianity is

TRUTH,

TRUTH, and that they were *not mistaken*, in any of the positions which they have laid down respecting it, in their writings.

2. A second and principal deduction however, to be drawn from the account before given, and which is of most importance to the subject is, that the Apostles of Jesus Christ, were under the *infallible* guidance of the Spirit of Truth, as to every religious sentiment which they taught mankind. Here it may be necessary to explain the sense, in which this expression is used. By every religious sentiment is intended, every sentiment that constitutes a part of Christian doctrine, or Christian duty. In every doctrine they taught, in every testimony they bore to facts respecting our Lord, in every opinion which they gave, concerning the import of those facts, in every precept, exhortation and promise they addressed to men, it appears to me, that they were under the *infallible* guidance of the Spirit of truth. By being under his guidance is meant, that through his influence on their minds, they were infallibly preserved from error in declaring the Gospel, so that every religious sentiment they taught is true, and agreeable to the will of God.

As to the nature of this influence and guidance, some things may be farther remarked. It was before observed, that inspiration in the highest sense, is the immediate communication of knowledge to the human mind, by the Spirit of God. In this way the apostle Paul was taught the whole of Christianity; and this kind of inspiration, the

other apostles had, as to those things which they were not acquainted with, before they received the gift of the Holy Spirit. This is what some have called, the inspiration of *suggestion*. But as to what they had heard, or partly known before, the influence of the Spirit enabled them properly to understand it, and preserved them from error in communicating it. This has been called the inspiration of *superintendency*. Under this superintendency or guidance of the Spirit, the Apostles appear to have been at *all times* throughout their ministry, after Christ's ascension. For less than this cannot be concluded, from our Lord's declaration, that the Spirit should *abide* with them *for ever*, and lead them into *all truth*.

When they acted as writers, recording Christianity for the instruction of the Church in all succeeding times, I apprehend, that they were under the guidance of the Spirit, as to the subjects of which they treated, that they wrote under his *influence and direction*, that they were preserved from all error and mistake, in the religious sentiments they expressed; and that, if any thing were inserted in their writings, not contained in that complete knowledge of Christianity of which they were previously possessed, (as prophecies for instance) this was immediately communicated to them, by revelation from the Spirit. But with respect to the choice of words in which they wrote, I know not but they might be left to the free and rational exercise of their own minds, to express themselves

in the manner that was natural and familiar to them, while at the same time they were preserved from error, in the ideas they conveyed. If this were the case, it would sufficiently account for the very observable diversity of style and manner, among the inspired writers. The Spirit guided them to write nothing but *truth* concerning religion, yet they might be left to express that truth in their own language.

It may readily and justly be concluded, that men who were under the perpetual guidance of the Spirit of Truth when they *preached* the Gospel, were thus under his *infallible* direction and influence, as to all religious sentiments, when they committed the things of the Gospel to writing, for the future instruction of the Church. This is the view of the inspiration of the writers of the New Testament, which seems naturally to arise, from their own account of the way in which they received the knowledge of Christianity, and from what is declared in their writings, concerning the *constant* agency and guidance of the Spirit, with which they were favoured. In a subsequent section we shall examine, what arguments Scripture, and the nature of the subject suggest, in support of it. But we may first remark some advantages attending *this view* of the subject.

Maintaining that the Apostles were under the infallible direction of the Holy Spirit, as to every religious sentiment contained in their writings, secures the same advantages as would result from
I supposing,

supposing, that every word and letter was dictated to them by his influences, without being liable to those objections which might be made against *that* view of the subject. As the Spirit preserved them from all error in what they have taught and recorded, their writings are of the same *authority, importance, and use* to us, as if he had dictated every syllable contained in them. If the Spirit had guided their pens in such a manner, that they had been only mere machines under his direction, we could have had no more in their writings than a *perfect* rule, as to all religious opinions and duties, all matters of faith and practice. But such a *perfect rule* we have in the New Testament, if we consider them as under the Spirit's infallible guidance in all the religious sentiments they express, whether he suggested the very words in which they are written, or not. Upon this view of the subject, the inspired writings contain a *perfect and infallible* account of the whole will of God for our salvation, of all that is necessary for us to know, believe and practise in religion; and what can they contain more than *this*, upon any other view of it?

Another advantage attending the above view of the apostolic inspiration is, that it will enable us to understand some things in their writings, which it might be difficult to reconcile with another view of the subject. If the inspiration and guidance of the Spirit, respecting the writers of the New Testament, extended only to what appears to be its proper province, matters of a religious and moral nature;

nature; then there is no necessity to ask, whether *every thing* contained in their writings were suggested immediately by the Spirit or not: whether Luke were inspired to say, that the ship in which he sailed with Paul, was wrecked on the Island of Melita *; or whether Paul were under the guidance of the Spirit, in directing Timothy to bring with him the cloke which he left at Troas, and the books, but especially the parchments †; for the answer is obvious, these were not things of a religious nature, and no inspiration was necessary concerning them. The inspired writers sometimes mention common occurrences or things in an incidental manner, as any other plain and faithful men might do. Although therefore, such things may be found in parts of the Evangelic history, or in epistles addressed to churches or individuals, and may stand connected with important declarations concerning Christian doctrine or duty, yet it is not necessary to suppose, that they were under any *supernatural* influence in mentioning such common or civil affairs, though they were, as to all the sentiments they inculcated respecting religion.

This view of the subject will also readily enable a plain Christian, in reading his New Testament, to distinguish what he is to consider as *inspired truth*. Every thing which the Apostles have written or taught concerning Christianity; every thing

* Acts xxviii, 1.

† 2 Tim. iv. 13.

which

which teaches him a religious sentiment or a branch of duty, he must consider as *divinely true*, as the mind and will of God, recorded under the direction and guidance of his Spirit. It is not necessary that he should inquire, whether what the Apostles taught be *true*. All that he has to search after is, their *meaning*; and when he understands what they *meant*, he may rest assured, that meaning is consistent with the will of God, is *divine infallible truth*. The testimony of men who spoke and wrote by the Spirit of God, is the testimony of God himself; and the testimony of the God of Truth is the strongest, and most *indubitable* of all demonstration.

The above view of the Apostolic inspiration will likewise enable us, as I apprehend, to understand the apostle Paul, in the seventh chapter of his first epistle to the Corinthians, where in some verses he seems to speak as if he were *not* inspired, and in others as if he *was*. Concerning some things he saith, "But I speak this by permission, and not of commandment *;" and again, "I have no commandment of the Lord; yet I give my judgment, as one that hath obtained mercy of the Lord to be faithful. †" The subject of which the Apostle here delivers his opinion, was a matter of Christian prudence, in which the Corinthians had desired his advice. But it was not a part of religious sentiment or practice; it was not a branch of Christian

* Ver. 6.

† Ver. 25.

doctrine or duty, but merely a casuistical question of prudence, with relation to the distress which persecution then occasioned. Paul therefore, agreeably to their request, gives them his opinion as a faithful man; but he guards them against supposing, that he was under divine inspiration in that opinion, lest their consciences should be shackled, and leaves them at liberty to follow his advice or not, as they might find convenient. Yet he intimates that he had "the Spirit of the Lord" as a christian teacher, that he had not said any thing contrary to his will; and that the opinion which he gave was, on the whole, advisable "in the present distress." But the Apostle's declaration, that as to this particular matter, he spoke "by permission, and not of commandment," strongly implies, that in other things, in things really of a religious nature, he *did* speak by commandment from the Lord. Accordingly, in the same chapter, when he had occasion to speak of what was matter of moral duty, he immediately claimed to be under divine direction in what he wrote. "And unto the married I command, yet not I but the Lord, "Let not the wife depart from her husband *." This would be a breach of one of the chief obligations of morality, and therefore Paul interdicts it under the divine authority. Respecting indifferent things, he gave his judgment as a wise and faithful friend, but respecting the things of religion,

* 1 Cor. vii. 10.

he spake and wrote as an apostle of Jesus Christ, under the direction and guidance of his spirit.

SECTION III.

*Arguments in support of the above View of the
Apostolic Inspiration.*

FROM a survey of the manner in which the Apostles came by their knowledge of Christianity, we have concluded, that they were under the infallible guidance of the Holy Spirit, in every religious sentiment which they taught mankind, whether by their preaching or their writings; that they were directed by the Spirit of truth, what to record for the instruction of the Church; and that in what they have written and recorded, they were infallibly preserved from error, so that every religious sentiment contained in their writings, is to be received as divine truth. This view of their inspiration, arising from their own account, may be confirmed by various arguments drawn from Scripture, and the nature of the subject.

I. It may be proved from the nature of the Apostolic office, which was designed to supply the place of Christ's bodily presence to the Church. It is generally allowed that the Lord Jesus Christ was a perfect teacher of the will of God; that he was acquainted with all religious truth, and that he taught nothing but truth in his doctrine. As
the

the teacher sent from God, he knew the mind and will of God. "He whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God: for God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto him*." He came to instruct men in the knowledge of divine truth, and he was "The faithful and true witness." But it is evident that, *in this respect*, the office of the Apostles was *similar* to that of Christ himself; and that they were commissioned and qualified as his agents, and in his room, to discharge the work of instructing the Church, and to communicate to it the will of God. There is a positive declaration of our Lord, which places this matter in the clearest light. He said to his Apostles, "As my Father hath sent me, *even so send I you* †." As the Father sent Christ into the world to "bear witness unto the truth ‡," so Christ sent his Apostles with a commission of the same nature, and to answer the same end. As he was sent to be an infallible teacher of the divine mind and will, so they in like manner were sent by him, on the same important and gracious errand. As he received his authority and his furniture, as the great prophet of the Church, from his heavenly Father, so they received their authority and their ability from him. They were sent by him on business of the same nature, in this respect, as that on which he had been sent by the Father; and were appointed by him, to carry on that work which he had begun by his personal ministry,

* John iii. 34.

† John xx. 21.

‡ John xviii. 37.

namely,

namely, the instruction of men in the knowledge of God and Salvation.

But what valuable end would have been answered, by giving the Apostles a commission of *this* nature, if they had not been endowed with abilities to discharge it? To what purpose would it have been, to send them in Christ's room, to teach men the things of God, unless they were enabled to supply his place, and had the same Spirit of truth to guide them in what they declared, and preserve them from error in the sentiments which they taught? How could our Lord himself have fulfilled the office of a "Teacher sent from God," if he had not had a perfect knowledge of the will of God? And how could the Apostles have fulfilled the office of his representatives, to declare the same mind and will to the Church, if they had not been abundantly supplied with his Spirit, and preserved from mistakes concerning it? If they had erred in the doctrines they taught, the sentiments they inculcated, or the duties they enjoined, how could they as teachers, fill up the place of him, who came forth from God, and who had the words of God? How could they be "The light of the world *," if they themselves were subject to darkness?

When the Father sent Christ among men as a divine and infallible teacher, he gave him in that character, not only a commission to teach, but a fulness of wisdom and knowledge, an immeasurable

* Matt. v. 14.

communication of his Spirit, to enable him to fulfil that commission, and “teach the way of God perfectly.” If, therefore, the Apostles had not been under such a degree of inspiration and guidance from the Holy Spirit, as gave them a complete knowledge of Christianity, and kept them from error in communicating it, they could not be said to be sent forth by our Lord, *even as the Father had sent him*. The grand points of resemblance, between their mission and that of Christ, as teachers of a Divine religion, lay in the nature of their commission, the end it was to answer, their ability for the proper execution of it, and the authority of what they declared under it. From their office, therefore, as intended to supply the place of our Lord’s bodily presence, and personal instructions to the Church, it may justly be concluded, that they were under the direction of his Spirit, in all that they have taught concerning the Gospel.

Agreeably to this representation, when Christ informed the Apostles, that he sent them into the world as the Father sent him, “He breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost*.” This action and expression signified the necessity of the Spirit’s special assistance and influence for them, the certainty of its bestowment upon them from Christ himself, and the authority of their doctrine after they should thus be extra-

* John xx. 22.

ordinarily qualified for declaring it. Our Lord therefore immediately added, "Whosoever sins ye
 " remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose-
 " soever sins ye retain, they are retained".* This
 was language which could not with propriety be
 used, respecting the sentiments or decisions of any
 men, but such as were *infallibly* guided by the
 Spirit of God.

The above view of their office accords with the
 character which the Apostles claimed, and which
 was *peculiar* to them, of being the *Ambassadors of*
Christ. In his intercessory prayer he said concern-
 ing them, "I have manifested thy name unto the
 " men which thou gavest me out of the world: I
 " have given unto them the words which thou
 " gavest me, and they have received them†." The
 knowledge he had in commission to declare,
 he had delivered to them, to communicate to man-
 kind. In what therefore they spake, or have written
 in his name concerning Christianity, they are to
 be considered as "*representing Christ*, in a manner
 similar to that, in which ambassadors at a foreign
 Court, represent the prince from whom they re-
 ceived their credentials. There is, therefore, the
same Divine truth and certainty in the things which
 the Apostles declare, and the *same* deference to be
 paid to them, as if it were Christ himself who had
 spoken those things, or recorded them for our in-
 struction‡. In perfect harmony with this idea, the

* John xx. 23.

† xvii. 6, 8.

‡ See Matth. x. 40. Luke x. 16. John xiii. 20.

Apostles claim to themselves the right of being regarded as the representatives of Christ, in making known the Gospel, "the word of reconciliation." "Now then," saith Paul, "we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us, we pray you, in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God*." The Apostle's argument in this verse, is evidently of this nature. "What Christ said, is to be considered as the *word of God*, and what we, the Apostles, say to you, is to be considered as the *word of Christ*, for we are his ambassadors, and speak in his stead; and therefore what we speak is *the word of God*!" a position which confirms the statement before made, that they were under the *infallible* guidance of the Holy Spirit.

II. Another argument to prove, that the Apostles were guided by the Holy Spirit in all the religious sentiments they taught, may be drawn from considering the *effect* of the *fulfilment* of the promise, that the Spirit should guide them into *all truth*, and *abide* with them *for ever*. Repeated reference has been made to this promise already, but it may not be improper farther to review here its *consequences* and *operation*, as confirming the view which we have taken of the subject. A promise that they should be led into an acquaintance with *all truth*, and that the Spirit, by whose agency they were to be made acquainted with it, should abide with

* 2 Cor. v. 20.

them *for ever*, must be of a most *extensive* nature. If their minds were furnished with a perfect knowledge of Christian truth, and the Spirit of truth constantly dwelt with them; what can be a stronger evidence, that they were preserved from error, in their religious views and sentiments?

If they were mistaken in their ideas, on any point of doctrine or duty, it must be either, because they never had been properly acquainted with the subject, or because they had forgotten and lost those ideas, which they once had concerning it. It could not be owing to the *former* of these suppositions, for the Spirit guided them into *all* evangelical truth: and it could not be owing to the *latter*, for he dwelt with them *for ever*. They could not then be mistaken at all in their religious views and representations, for, in consequence of our Lord's promise, they were defended against the only sources of error that can be supposed respecting them, ignorance, and forgetfulness.

This argument proves, *generally*, that the Apostles were under the *constant* guidance of the Holy Spirit in *all* that they *taught* concerning religion. And, if they were under his guidance, in the oral instructions which they gave mankind, there can be no room to doubt their being under, at least an equal degree of his guidance, when they *wrote* for the instruction of the Church in future times. Can we suppose that the influence of the Spirit deserted them when it was most necessary, when it was most important, when the want of it would be most *extensively*

tenſively injurious to the cauſe of truth? An error, if it had exiſted in their *preaching*, would have affected ſcarcely any but their immediate hearers. Its conſequences would have been limited and confined. But an error of religious ſentiment, if it could be ſuppoſed in their *writings*, which have been regarded as a ſtandard of faith and worſhip, would have had the moſt pernicious and widely extended influence. The error of an apoſtolic *preacher*, might have miſſed a few primitive Chriſtians who heard him, but the errors of an apoſtolic *writer*, if ſuch were to be ſuppoſed, muſt miſlead, not merely a ſingle congregation, not the Chriſtians of one ſociety, of one country, or of one age only, but Chriſtians of every Church, of every country, and of every age, in which the religion of Chriſt has been received and profeſſed. But we have ſeen, that our Lord's promiſe ſecured his Apoſtles againſt miſtake and error, in their common addreſſes to mankind on the various topics of the Goſpel; and undoubtedly it did not afford them *leſs ſecurity*, when they committed their ſentiments to writing, and recorded facts and doctrines, promiſes and precepts, for the direction of the Church, in every ſubſequent age of the world. They were the ambaffadors of Chriſt, who were ſent by him in his room. They had his Spirit to guide them into all truth, and be with them for ever. When therefore they taught the things of the Goſpel, and left them on record for our inſtruction, it was "not in the words which man's wiſdom teacheth," but in

words which the Holy Ghost taught them, that our "faith should not stand in the wisdom of men" but in the power of God."

III. A farther argument in support of that view of the Apostolic inspiration, which has been before stated, may be deduced from the insufficiency of the New Testament to be a guide of religious opinions, unless their inspiration as to matters of *sentiment* be granted. If the Apostles were not under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, in *all* that they have written concerning Christianity, then we can have no evidence, that the New Testament is a sure and complete rule whereby to form our views of the Christian religion. If the writers of it were liable to errors and mistakes, we are deprived at once of a perfect standard of faith and practice.

It is the peculiar and distinguishing excellence of a Revelation from God, that it supplies the deficiencies of natural religion, and furnishes us with a *perfect* guide as to every branch of religious sentiment and moral duty. Revelation fixes with certainty those truths which natural light rendered probable. It clears what was obscure, establishes what was doubtful, gives demonstration to many truths which otherwise have only the evidence of probability, and supplies the defects of natural religion, by making known other, and glorious truths, which could not have been discovered without it. But these advantages, however necessary and important, cannot be secured by a Revelation that is *not perfect and complete*. They are advantages which
arise

arise from the *perfection* of the Scriptures, from their being written under the direction of the Holy Spirit, and cannot, on any other ground, be supposed to exist.

If it be granted, as the most satisfactory evidence proves, that the New Testament was written under Divine direction and guidance, we have then a perfect standard, to which we may appeal in the Truths of Religion, and by which we may form our sentiments, concerning the true way of acceptance with God, the proper ground of hope for eternity, and the nature of that obedience which is pleasing in his sight. But if it be not granted, that the Apostles were under the constant direction of the Holy Spirit, then we have no infallible guide in the doctrines and duties of Christianity, and on subjects of the greatest importance to our peace, hope, and obedience, we are left to the most distressing darkness and perplexity.

If the Apostles were not guided by the Spirit of truth in all the religious opinions they entertained, and which are expressed in their writings, then they might be *fallible*, and might *err* as much as other men. If they were liable to err in any of their doctrines and sentiments, who can tell where their errors ended? or who shall in that case draw the line, to divide between *error* and *truth* in their writings? If they might be mistaken in one instance, why not in another? If they fell into errors in some of their sentiments, why not in others of them? And how shall we then know, which of their sen-

timents were *true*, or which were *false*? We should be utterly at a loss to ascertain this at all, and instead of having the clear lamp of truth to illuminate our path, we must own that

“ Shadows, clouds, and darkness, rest upon it.”

We are driven therefore to one of these two conclusions, either that the Apostolic writers were guided by the Spirit of God, in *all* that they have written for the instruction of the Church, or that we have no *infallible* rule of faith, and that the Church of God is left without any sufficient guide in Religion. Which of these conclusions is most *rational* and *just*, most worthy of God, and most consistent with the benevolent nature of the Gospel, as intended to enlighten a dark and benighted world, may be easily determined.

Admitting that the Apostles wrote under the influence and direction of the Holy Spirit, we have, in all cases, a certain standard whereby to regulate our religious opinions. Amidst the vague conjectures and jarring sentiments of men, amidst the clouds of ignorance and the sophistry of error, we may turn our eyes to the clear and pure light of Revelation, and form our religious sentiments from the declarations of men, who learned Divine truth from the lips of the Son of God; and were guided in recording it by his Spirit. Here the mind may find satisfaction, certainty, and truth, notwithstanding the discordant opinions

opinions which prevail among weak and fallible men; and here the soul may repose with hope and confidence, assured that it cannot be deceived, while it rests "Upon the foundation of the Apostles" and Prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the "chief corner stone *."

But if it be not admitted, that the Apostles were under the guidance of the Spirit, as to all matters of religious sentiment, then we have no *certain rule* to direct our faith. With the New Testament in our hands, we are thrown back into the wilderness of nature, unable, on the most interesting topics, to distinguish truth from falsehood, and are left to explore our path in the regions of religious inquiry, through the trackless maze of human ignorance, conjectures and errors, with no surer guide than the dim light of nature; whose insufficiency to conduct sinful men to the true knowledge of God, the history of the world abundantly proves; and by which, instead of being led into the way of truth, we should be lost in darkness and confusion. But it never can be justly supposed, that the God of truth and goodness, after having sent his Son into the world to die for the redemption of men, would leave them without a complete and perfect rule to guide their religious knowledge and practice. *Such* a rule we have in the New Testament, it was written under Divine direction, and if it had not

* Eph. ii. 20,

been

been so written, it would *not* be sufficient to answer this end.

IV. The argument to support the above view of the inspiration of the Apostolic Writers, will be strengthened by considering, that if it be not allowed they were under the *infallible* guidance of the Spirit, in all they have taught concerning Christianity, the *credibility of their doctrine in general*, will be greatly impaired. It is an opinion common to every description of professing Christians, that the New Testament is the word of God, and consequently they must allow, that those who wrote it, were in *some* sense, or in *some degree* inspired men. But if their inspiration be granted at all, it must be either, respecting all the sentiments which they taught concerning the Religion of Christ, or only as to some of them. If they were under the direction of the Spirit only in some of their sentiments, and there be others in their writings, concerning which they were not under his guidance, but were mistaken, those who entertain *this opinion*, should point out with *certainty* and *precision*, wherein the Apostolic Writers were guided by the Spirit, and wherein they were not; in which of their sentiments they were *mistaken*, and in which they *were not*. They should furnish us with some certain *criteria*, whereby we may distinguish truth from error, in the writings of the Apostles; and by which we may know, what we are to *receive* as the word of the Holy Ghost, and what we ought to *reject*, as the mistakes of weak and fallible men.

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For unless this be done, the credibility of the Apostolic testimony, as to revealed truth in general, will be greatly weakened upon their position. But this never can be done, for it is impossible, that those who question the truth of the sentiments which the Apostles taught, should furnish us with any rules or criteria to judge of their sentiments, but what would be far more *dubious* and *uncertain*, than the writings of which they are to enable us to judge. If any should pretend to furnish such criteria, or rules of distinguishing truth from error in the Apostolic Writings, they must be drawn up by men who have, and who make, no pretensions to inspiration. They must consequently be more liable to err, than those who had the Spirit of God, in some degree *at least*, to guide them.

If it be impossible to frame any rules, which can enable us to distinguish truth from error, in the sentiments of the Apostles, to suppose that there *are such errors* in their writings, must necessarily lessen the credibility of their testimony, as to religious sentiments *in general*. For if they were mistaken in some things which they have taught, why might they not mistake in others? And as we have no rules by which to judge in this case, how shall we determine which of their doctrines are truths, and which are errors? Some professing Christians believe one set of religious opinions, some another, by what means shall we ascertain which of the different systems is right, unless the writings of the Apostles are to be received, as the infallible
standard

standard and test of *all* religious opinions? If one thinks, that the Apostolic Writers were mistaken, when they speak of the miraculous conception of Christ, of the doctrine of the atonement, of the forgiveness of sins through his blood, or of the separate and conscious existence of the soul after death, why may not another, with as much reason suppose, that they were mistaken, when they speak of the resurrection of the dead, or of the doctrine of a final judgment. If the former doctrines are to be rejected, because they do not agree with one man's views, why may not the latter be rejected because they do not agree with the views of another? If reason and private opinion, and not the Scriptures, are to be the standard of *revealed* truth, there will be no end to uncertainty and error; and the *credibility* of the doctrines of Revelation *in general*, will be shaken to its very basis.

It may indeed be objected here, That many truths of Religion are demonstrable by the light of nature, or may be proved from reason, and therefore *these* would remain certain, though the writers of the Scriptures should be supposed liable to mistake. It is true, that those doctrines concerning the existence and providence of God, which are evident from natural light, would remain independent of Revelation. Nevertheless, the objection now stated, is such as takes away the *usefulness*, and indeed the necessity of Revelation. For if no other truths are needful to be known, than could have been discovered *without* Revelation, and if *with* its assistance

assistance we have no certainty of any truth, but what might be ascertained *without it*, where then could be the *necessity* or the *utility* of it? None of the professed friends of Revelation, therefore, can consistently urge an objection of this nature, because it reduces Christianity down to a mere system of natural religion, by rendering every thing contained in the Gospel *uncertain*, that is not confirmed by the light of nature. Unless therefore we believe the Apostles to be under divine direction, as to *all* the religious sentiments which they taught, we shall have no certainty of *any* sentiments that are *peculiar* to Christianity: and notwithstanding God hath favored us with the Holy Scriptures, we shall still be left to the feebleness and imperfection of natural light. While however we have full evidence, that the Apostles were guided by the Spirit of truth, we know that they taught *truth*, and that the truth which they taught, is a bright and luminous emanation of Divine wisdom and love, suited to the circumstances of guilty and ignorant men, and unspeakably more valuable and useful, than all that the unassisted light of nature could ever discover.

V. It is not only the credibility of Christian doctrines in general, that would be degraded, by supposing, the Apostles were not guided by the Spirit in all that related to religion, but also we shall have no *certainty*, that their testimony is true *as to the facts they record*, unless we allow they were under the guidance of the Spirit in the religious sentiments

ments they taught, because *this was a fact* in their opinion. The Apostles certainly thought themselves inspired. They believed it as *a fact*, that they had the guidance of the Spirit of God; and if they were mistaken in *this fact*, how shall we be certain, that they were not mistaken in *other facts* to which they bear testimony?

We, indeed, are not able to judge of that kind of evidence, by which inspired men knew themselves to be inspired. For it is not possible, that we should be in their circumstances, or have such evidence presented to our minds. But of whatever nature that evidence might be, it was such as they were able to form a complete and perfect judgment of, so that they knew with as much certainty their own inspiration, as they did the reality of objects presented before their eyes. Their history proves, that they knew when they were moved, by the influences of the Spirit on their minds, to work miracles; and those who could judge of his influences on their hearts in one case, could be at no loss to distinguish them in another.

Now that the Apostles thought themselves to be under the direction and influence of the Holy Spirit in teaching Christianity, or that their inspiration was *a fact* in their own apprehension, is evident from their language on many occasions. Paul assured the Galatians, in the passage before quoted, that he had learned the Gospel only "by the Revelation of Jesus Christ." He said to the Corinthians, concerning the things peculiar to Christianity,

tianity, " God hath revealed them unto us by his
 " Spirit: Now we have received, not the Spirit
 " of the world, but the Spirit which is of God,
 " that we might know the things that are freely
 " given to us of God; which things we speak in
 " words which the Holy Ghost teacheth: We have
 " the mind of Christ *. I think also that I have
 " the Spirit of God †." Did the Apostle think
 wrong in this respect? Was he mistaken in the
 opinion he had of his own inspiration? Was it not
 rather evident, from the miracles he wrought under
 the direction of the Spirit, and from the extraor-
 dinary gifts he possessed, that he had, as he said,
 the Spirit of God? When writing to the Church
 of the Thessalonians he asserts, that the Gospel, as
 preached by him and the other Apostles, was the
 " Word of God:." Ye received it not as the word
 of " men, but as it is in truth the word of God ‡." In
 the same epistle he declares, respecting those
 who treated the Apostolic doctrine with con-
 tempt, " He therefore that despiseth, despiseth not
 " man, but God, who hath also given unto us his
 " Holy Spirit §." Despising *their* doctrine could
 not be despising God, unless it had been truth
 which God himself declared, by their instrumen-
 tality.

As the Apostles thus speak of themselves as in-
 spired persons, so they claim that regard to be paid
 to their doctrine, which could be due only to such,

* 1 Cor. ii. 10, 12, 13, 16.

† Chap. vii. 40.

‡ 1 Thess. ii. 13,

§ Ch. iv. 8.

as were under the *infallible* guidance of the Spirit.
 “ But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach
 “ any other Gospel to you than that which we have
 “ preached to you, let him be accursed *.” Why
 did the Apostle thus interdict all other doctrine to
 the Churches of Galatia, but because he knew, that
 which he had taught them, was the true mind and
 will of God? Would he have presumed thus to de-
 nounce an Anathema, against those who preached
 another Gospel, if he had not been conscious, that
 he had authority and direction to do it, from the
 God of truth and righteousness? In like manner,
 the other Apostles claim respect to be paid to their
 doctrine, as of *Divine* Authority. Peter saith to
 the Christians whom he addresses, “ This second
 “ epistle, beloved, I now write unto you; That ye
 “ may be mindful of the words which were spoken
 “ before by the holy prophets, *and of the command-*
 “ *ment of us the Apostles of the Lord and Saviour†.*”
 Jude, when he would guard Christians against those
 who corrupted the Gospel saith, “ But, beloved,
 “ remember ye the words which were spoken before
 “ of the Apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ‡.”
 John, for the like purpose asserts, “ We are of
 “ God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he
 “ that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby
 “ know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of
 “ error§.” It would have been vanity and pre-
 sumption in the highest degree, for any men to use the

* Gal. i. 8.

† 2 Pet. iii. 1, 2.

‡ Jude ver. 17.

§ 1 John iv. 6.

language contained in the above passages, concerning *their own doctrine* and instructions, if they had not had, as they asserted, the special direction and guidance of Heaven. But it was natural and *just* for men who believed they were led by the Spirit of God, to express themselves in this manner; and their miraculous operations were a decisive proof, that they did not do it from vanity or arrogance, but that they had, as they professed, the presence and influence of the Holy Spirit with them.

These passages of Scripture, therefore, with others which might be mentioned, fully prove, that the Apostles considered themselves to be under the teaching and guidance of the Spirit of Christ, according to his promise. But if they were mistaken in *this fact*, what satisfactory evidence can we have, that they might not be mistaken as to other facts which they record? Men that could err in a matter of such importance, might err in other things, and if they have in one case borne a *false* testimony, who shall decide where their testimony is true? Might they not be mistaken in saying that Christ gave them a commission, or that he rose from the dead, as well as in saying that they had the Spirit of God, and spake under his direction, if indeed this were a mistake at last? If we do not allow, therefore, the truth of the apostolic testimony respecting their own inspiration, which was a fact in their view, we may, on the same ground, question the truth of their testimony, as to other facts

in the Gospel of the most important nature, and on which our hope and comfort are founded.

The argument here advanced is not inconsistent with what was before said, concerning the credibility of the Apostolic testimony, supposing them only to be *honest men* *. For that statement implied, that they did *not profess* to be under the influence of the Spirit in communicating the Gospel, though they received the knowledge of it in a great measure by his teaching. But if it be admitted, as the above texts most clearly shew, that they apprehended themselves to have the constant guidance of the Spirit with them, in making known the Gospel to men, and if they were mistaken in *this fact*, then the argument here used is valid to prove, that on *this* ground, their credibility as to other facts would be weakened.

VI. If, however, we were to allow in general the authenticity of their declarations, as to the *facts* which they have recorded in the Gospel, their testimony even to those facts would be *useless*, unless we admit, that they were under the guidance of the Spirit in all their religious *sentiments*. This is another consideration to prove, that they had his infallible direction. The knowledge of the facts recorded in the Gospel, can be no farther valuable or useful to us, than as we understand the *meaning* or *import* of them; but the *import* of those facts is matter of *sentiment* concerning them; and this can

be learned only, from the account which the Apostles give of them. If, therefore, they were not guided by the Spirit of truth in their opinion of the import of Gospel-facts, or were liable to err in what they have said of them, and the inferences they have drawn from them, of what use can their testimony to the facts themselves be to us?

The Resurrection of Christ, for instance, is a most important fact in the Evangelical history, and is considered by all Christians, as a proof and earnest of the general resurrection of the dead. But where did Christians learn *this* doctrine, from *this* fact? Certainly, not from the simple fact itself, but from the sentiments and declarations of the Apostles concerning it. Paul hath assured us, "Now is Christ
"risen from the dead, and become the first fruits of
"them that slept*." The doctrine he preached to the Athenian Philosophers was, that God "hath
"appointed a day in the which he will judge the
"world in righteousness, by that man whom he
"hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance
"unto all men, in that he hath raised him from
"the dead†." But if the Apostle had not been guided by the Spirit, in what he said concerning Christ's resurrection, the fact alone could not prove to us, the doctrine of the resurrection of men in general from the dead. How could we draw an universal conclusion from a single instance? Viewing the fact alone, it might be denied to be any

* 1 Cor. xv. 20.

† Acts xvii. 31.

proof of the certainty of a future resurrection, if inspired men had not taught us so to consider it. The certain resurrection of *all* mankind, could no more be logically inferred from the resurrection of *one* human body, than we could infer, that men in general would be taken to Heaven without seeing death, because two of the human race, Enoch and Elijah, were so translated. For the *use* or *import* of the facts recorded in the Gospel, we must have recourse, therefore, to the Apostolic writers, and learn it from *their sentiments* of them; sentiments which would not be a sure guide to us, and which would not render the Gospel-history useful, if they had not been influenced and directed in their opinions, by the Spirit of all truth and grace.

VII. To the foregoing arguments it may be added, that there are *internal* evidences of the inspiration of the sacred writers, in those instances where it is not particularly declared. This observation applies directly to the writings of Luke and Mark, who were not Apostles, as well as to many things in the writings of the Apostles themselves; and, taken in connexion with what has been already advanced, will strengthen the proof of that *infallible* guidance and direction which the writers of the New Testament were under.

The Gospels, and the Acts of the Apostles, were written long after the things recorded in them took place. In the Gospel of John we have many discourses of considerable length, which our Lord addressed to the Jews, as well as that to his disciples,

ples, which was mentioned before: It is impossible to account how the Evangelist should give them as he has done, unless we admit, that, according to our Lord's promise, he had the Spirit to "bring all things to his remembrance." In the Gospel of Luke, we have many parts of the history of our Saviour, and some of his parables, which are not to be found in the other Evangelists. How did Luke know these things, or how was he enabled to record them, unless he had the same Spirit of truth to guide *him*, as influenced the Apostle John?

In the Acts of the Apostles, we have several of their addresses and discourses given, as far as they are related, in their own words, which it is evident the sacred historian did not hear when they were delivered. Such are Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost, his address in the house of Cornelius, Stephen's defence before the Jewish Sanhedrim, Paul's speech at Athens, and his discourse at Antioch in Pisidia. How could the writer come by an accurate knowledge of these things, and give such a faithful narration of them, unless they were suggested to him by the Spirit of God? There are other things recorded by him, which it is not supposable he could have any exact knowledge of, but from immediate revelation. Of this nature is the speech of Gamaliel, delivered *privately* in the council, after the Apostles were "put forth;" and the letter of Lyfias the chief captain, to Felix the governor concerning Paul.

Such accounts as these, we must admit, were either brought to the mind of the writer by the Spirit of him who "knoweth all things," or else, that they are but the composition of the historian himself. The former conclusion would be a strong collateral proof of Luke's inspiration; the latter would degrade the sacred history to a level with the writings of other historians, who, when they have a statesman or a hero in a situation where he ought to make a speech, *fabricate* one for him, and insert it as his own. It requires no hesitation to determine, which of these alternatives is most probable, and best accords with the promise given to the disciples, that the "Spirit should guide them into all truth."

Upon a review of the whole argument therefore, it appears, that the nature of the Apostolic office, as designed to supply the place of the great teacher sent from God, and the promise of our Lord, that the Spirit should be given to the Apostles to qualify them for this important office, and guide them continually in the execution of it, fully prove that they were under his constant and *infallible* direction in all that they have taught or written concerning the religion of Christ. Unless this view of their inspiration be received, it cannot be made to appear, that the New Testament is either a *certain* or *sufficient* rule to us, in the doctrines and duties of Christianity. On any other representation of the subject, the credibility of *revealed truth* in general will be greatly shaken. We cannot even have any certainty

tainty of the *facts* which the Apostles declare, if they were mistaken in believing it to be a *fact* that they were *inspired* men; nor would their testimony to the facts themselves be beneficial to us, if they were fallible in the opinion and judgment they express concerning them. But admitting, as all these considerations clearly evince, that they were under the constant and infallible guidance of the Spirit of God, we may then see many collateral proofs of their inspiration, arising from various things contained in their writings, which could not be otherwise accounted for; and we have the most satisfactory evidence, that those writings are a *sure and infallible guide* to us, in all matters of *religious opinion*, as well as practice.

To suppose that the Apostles of Jesus Christ were mistaken in *any* of their religious views, is a position which renders the *whole* of their sentiments concerning religious truth *dubious* and *uncertain*, which leads to the *rejection* of them as the mere opinions of *fallible* men, and which thereby, in its consequences, has a direct tendency to deism; nor does it appear, how Christianity can be proved to be a *divine* religion, if it be admitted, that those who say they taught it under the direction of the Spirit of God, really had *not* that divine direction which they claimed and asserted.

I. In concluding our inquiry, it is obvious to remark, therefore, that the subject discussed in the preceding pages is not merely of a speculative, but of a practical, and very important nature, and

enters deeply into the ground of our religious views and conduct. According to our ideas of the inspiration of the Apostles, will be our belief of the doctrines they teach, our dependence on the promises they declare, and our subjection to the precepts they enjoin. The degree of *deference* due to their declarations, is clearly ascertained by the divine authority and direction under which they wrote. As they had the infallible guidance of the Spirit of God, their testimony is both the *rule* and the *warrant* of our faith. Whatever religious sentiments they have declared, are to be received and believed, because they are *divinely* and *infallibly true*: and whatever opinions in religion are contrary to the plain and *unstrained* language and sentiments of the Apostles of Christ, *ought* to be rejected, because they are undoubtedly *false*, in the same proportion as they deviate from the infallible rule of truth.

In this entire deference to the *authority* of the Apostolic doctrine, there is nothing inconsistent with the freedom of religious inquiry. On subjects of pure Revelation, the light of Revelation *only* can be our certain guide; and the way to examine *fully* into any topic, is to bring it to that light, in which *alone* it can be distinctly seen and scrutinized. Speculation, indeed, under certain limitations, may be indulged. Inquiry on religious subjects *ought* to be free; it cannot be too free from prejudices of every kind. But in Christianity it should be ever remembered, that *free inquiry* is not
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an *unlimited* range in the boundless and perplexing labyrinths of speculation, because it is our inestimable privilege to have an infallible guide to direct our inquiries, that where human speculation is at a loss, Divine authority may decide.

In modern times, some do not appear to have entertained just views of *this* authority. Many are fond of exploding old sentiments in divinity as well as in philosophy, and are seeking new systems of faith as well as new systems of nature, forgetting that the *standard* of *divine* truth is *fixed* and *unalterable*; "the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever*." But although this deference for the authority of the Apostles, in matters of religious sentiment, may have fallen into disrepute, the Christian, satisfied of the divine origin of his religion, should still "remember the words which were spoken before by the Apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ †," and adhere to *their* sentiments, unmoved by the speculations of philosophy, the cavilling objections of scepticism, or the contempt and ridicule of infidelity. "Stand fast in the faith," said Paul to the Corinthians, "quit you like men, be strong ‡."

This exhortation evidently implies, that the faith of the Gospel is something which may be *known* and understood. The differences of opinion concerning it, amongst those who profess the Christian name, is not imputable to obscurity in Revelation, but to other causes. As the Scriptures are

* 1 Pet. i. 23. † Jude, ver. 17. ‡ 1 Cor. xvi. 13.

the word of God, they must contain a certain and determinate sense, which may be known and ascertained. The denial of this assertion would imply a reflection upon God, by supposing that he had given us a Revelation which we did not, and which we could not possibly understand. Our duty concerning it, therefore, undoubtedly is, by every means in our power, to ascertain impartially its real meaning, and to follow it as our only, complete, and infallible guide in religion.

2. The above view of the subject may lead us also to observe, that the goodness of God in directing his servants the Apostles, to record the truths and duties of Christianity for our instruction, should excite our warmest gratitude and thankfulness to him. In the concerns of religion, we are not left to the vague conjectures, the imperfect reasonings, or the wild imaginations and theories of fallible men, but have the oracles of divine truth to guide us in the knowledge of God and salvation. We have his own holy word, to acquaint us with the important facts respecting the obedience, sufferings, death, resurrection, and ascension of his Son. We have the writings of men who were led and influenced by his Spirit, to teach us the doctrine of forgiveness and reconciliation with God through Jesus Christ, and to instruct us in the nature and obligations of all the duties of holiness. Amidst the various opinions which agitate the religious world, we have the inspired word of truth to appeal to, as the unerring standard and
guide

guide of our faith. Amidst all the fears and concern which a consciousness of guilt will often awaken in a serious and reflecting mind, we have the infallible "word of reconciliation" to consult, which brings the glad tidings of pardon and peace with God through Jesus Christ. Amidst all the seductions of pleasure, and temptations of sin, we have the word of God to direct us to the practice of godliness, righteousness, meekness, and temperance. And amidst all the trials and afflictions, which the Christian may meet with in the present life, we have the pure waters of consolation, flowing from the crystaline fountain of inspired truth and promises, to refresh our souls. What abundant cause have we therefore to be *thankful* for the Scriptures of the Prophets and Apostles! They are an invaluable treasure to the Christian. A fund of instruction ever new; a source of comfort that can never be exhausted.

3. The inspiration and infallible guidance of the Spirit which the Apostles were favoured with, teach us on what a firm basis the faith and hope of the Christian are placed, who adopts the sentiments and relies on the truths which they declared. He forms his creed, not on human but divine authority, and believes, not on the testimony of men, but on the testimony of God in his own word. His hope depends, not on any absurd doctrines or superstitious rites of human invention, but upon that truth which can never be shaken, and which was revealed under the direction of the Spirit of truth.

truth. How greatly does it increase all the consolations which the Gospel administers to the Christian's mind, to reflect, that they are drawn from the *infallible* word of divine truth! When he rejoices in the promise of acceptance and peace with God, through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, this joy is built, not on the assertions of mere fallible men, but on the veracity of a gracious and faithful God. When he feels the consolatory efficacy of the Christian-hope, and looks beyond the present vain and transitory world, with anticipation and delight, to a state of perfect knowledge, purity, and peace, this consolation does not arise from the visionary reveries of misguided men, it is not derived from the Elysian dreams of those who "followed cunningly devised fables," but from the declarations of men who were inspired by the Spirit of truth, from the promises of him who ruleth over the *invisible* as well as the visible world, who hath the "keys of hell and of death*," who "openeth and no man shutteth, and shutteth and no man openeth*."

4. As the infallibility of the apostolic doctrine shews the security of the Christian's hope, so it gives additional strength to all the precepts of the Gospel, to know that they were taught and enjoined, under the inspiration and guidance of the Spirit of God. It is not the voice or doctrine of men only, but the voice of God that calls us to

* Rev. i. 18. and iii. 7.

"be holy in all manner of conversation*," that directs us to "come out from among them" who associate in iniquity, "and be separate†," and commands us that "denying ungodliness and "worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, "and godly, in this present world‡." The holy injunctions of the Gospel are clothed with *divine* authority, and therefore they ought to have a binding influence on the conscience of every man. They are not the unnecessary severities of men, but the holy laws of God, which direct us to self-denial and the mortification of sin, the exercise of patience, humility, and spiritual-mindedness. It is his supreme authority that demands of us the practice of truth and righteousness, temperance and purity, meekness and benevolence, and teaches us to "*abound* in every good word and work." With what weight, therefore, should all the precepts of the Gospel lie upon our minds, when we reflect, that it is God himself who requireth our observance of them, and whose word hath testified that, "without holiness no man shall see the Lord §!"

5. The infallibility, divine authority, and usefulness of the Holy Scriptures, farther shew, that they ought to be seriously and diligently searched by us. As God hath caused his word to be written for our instruction, it must be our duty to study it carefully, and the neglect of it would be highly cri-

* 1 Pet. i. 15.

† 2 Cor. vi. 17.

‡ Tit. ii. 12.

§ Heb. xii. 14.

minal. If we would learn the knowledge of Christ, and be made "wise unto salvation," where should we seek this wisdom, but in the writings of his inspired servants? If we would be preserved from errors and mistakes in religion, the most effectual antidote against them is, to have our minds well-furnished with *scriptural principles*. If we would behold the true glory of Christianity, and be established in the consolation, peace, and holiness of the Gospel, we must search into those views which are given of it in the writings of the Apostles, and the noble hopes and promises which the language of inspired men present to our regard. If we would be prepared for the proper discharge of every duty, and daily advance in the path to Heaven, we must follow the directions of the Scripture, which, in the New Testament, as well as in the Old, was "given by inspiration of God, and is "profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the "man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished "unto all good works *."

6. From a review of the inspiration of the Apostles, we may learn, finally, what abundant reason we have to admire the wisdom and benevolence of God, in interposing to reform and save men, by the revelation of knowledge from himself. Dark, ignorant, and miserable, was the state of the world previous to the introduction of Christianity.

* 2 Tim. iii. 16, 17.

“Darkness covered the earth, and gross darkness the people†.” By the revelation of divine truth to his inspired servants, who were sent forth to preach the Gospel, God graciously interposed, to inform, reclaim, purify, and save guilty men. This is a most pleasing and wonderful display, both of his wisdom and his benevolence.

By means of that knowledge which he communicated, the ignorance, idolatry, and vices of the heathen world were subdued, and the kingdom of Christ first established amongst men. It is by means of the same knowledge, recorded under the direction of that Spirit who gave it to the Apostles, that he still enlightens the mind, purifies the heart, and guides to salvation: What a divine subject of admiration is it, that God thus mercifully appeared, to rescue the ignorant, the polluted, and the miserable! The philosophic eye beholds with pleasure, the benevolence of God in the visible universe, and the excellent ends which its various parts, whether magnificent or minute, are combined to answer. But the religious mind may feel more sublime pleasure, in contemplating that divine benevolence which, by means of inspired Apostles, revealed the Gospel, to enlighten a dark, ignorant, and idolatrous world; which, by this communication of religious knowledge, is still employed, not to provide temporary accommodations for creatures during a short period of their existence,

* Isaiah lx. 2.

but to raise guilty and sinful beings from ignorance, vice, and misery, to peace, holiness, and hope, upon earth, and finally exalt them to a state of everlasting purity, perfection, and blessedness, with himself in the heavenly world. Let us then gratefully and devoutly admire, this benevolent interposition of the God of Love! Let us highly esteem, and firmly adhere to the inspired word of truth, as the unerring rule of our faith, the immoveable foundation of our hope, the inexhaustible source of our peace and consolation, and the holy guide of our lives and actions.

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